

Second Reaction: Is Humpty Dumpty Gritty? Questioning a Paper Airplane Muse.

Santat, Dan. *After the Fall (How Humpty Dumpty Got Back Up Again)*. New York, Roaring Brook Press, 2017.

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Who knew that Humpty Dumpty had such grit? At least, that is what the reader can surmise from reading *After the Fall (How Humpty Dumpty Got Back Up Again)* by Dan Santat. Humpty is cracked, bruised, and his spirit is broken . . . he has experienced trauma. And yet, he perseveres. I must admit, I was completely surprised and even a little lost when I first read the book. Santat provides the classic “if at first you don’t succeed” moral. Granted, Humpty takes his time going back up the wall. Humpty has time to heal. He finds inspiration in something as typical as a paper airplane, “My plane was perfect and it flew like nothing could stop it. I hadn’t felt that happy in a long time” (unpaged). That’s great for Humpty, but is it realistic for our students who have experienced trauma?

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA), “Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic events, including abuse and neglect.” Most of my career has been spent working with students who would score entirely too high on an ACE assessment, which tallies one’s exposure to these traumatic events (Starcheski). I appreciate Santat’s recognition of the reality of trauma and its effect on people, whether it be children or adults, but again the solution seems too simple. Have courage. Don’t give up. Be

gritty. Get back up there. Persevere. Find your muse. Be like Humpty: “I didn’t look up. I didn’t look down. I just kept climbing” (unpaged). Humpty is brave. He is courageous! What if you aren’t like Humpty? What does that make you?

Dr. Paul Gorski outlines issues associated with “grit ideology” in his article, “Poverty and the ideological imperative: a call to unhook from deficit and grit ideology and to strive for structural ideology in teacher education” (382-3). According to Gorski, grit ideology implies that our students make the conscious decision to work hard until their hopes and dreams are realized, or when the going gets too tough, they give up. It pushes the antiquated “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” mentality. It neglects the cold, hard truths of poverty and systematic oppression. Teachers who buy into grit ideology with no understanding of the policies, procedures, and structures in place that make it nearly impossible for some people, students included, to persevere are doing kids and families a disservice. There is no pulling yourself up by the bootstraps if you have neither the boots nor straps by which to do so.

On a lighter note, my nephew, the greatest Humpty Dumpty fan of all time, seemed to thoroughly enjoy the book. He was just as shocked as I was (spoiler alert) when Humpty Dumpty busted out of his shell and turned into a bird at the end of the book—reinforcing the idea that those who scrape themselves up off the sidewalk can realize their dreams in one fell swoop of the feather, “He turned into a bird? Did he actually turn into a bird? Tell us that!!” (Luke, age 5).

My challenge to all parents and educators who may read this is to understand and convey to youth that for some of us, picking ourselves up off the sidewalk is much more difficult than for others. Some of us have better shoes to guard our feet, thicker pants to break our fall, friends and family to help us up, teachers and coaches to encourage us to keep climbing. Some of us don’t have access to all the king’s horses and all the king’s men to jumpstart our healing process. With that being said, some culminating reflection questions for this book could be: “What can we all do for the Humpty Dumptys we know in our lives? How can we support them and help them realize their dreams? If we are experiencing trauma like Humpty, what and/or who do we need to be in order to get back up on the wall again?”

Works Cited

- Gorski, Paul C. “Poverty and the ideological imperative: a call to unhook from deficit and grit ideology and to strive for structural ideology in teacher education.” *Journal of Education for Teaching*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2016, pp. 378-386, DOI: 10.1080/02607476.2016.1215546
- “Adverse Childhood Experiences” Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 7 Jul. 2018, <https://www.samhsa.gov/capt/practicing-effective-prevention/prevention-behavioral-health/adverse-childhood-experiences>
- Starecheski, Laura. “Take the ACE Quiz—And Learn What It Does and Doesn’t Mean.” NPR, 2 Mar. 2015, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2015/03/02/387007941/take-the-ace-quiz-and-learn-what-it-does-and-doesn-t-mean>

About the Author

Allison Segarra Hansen has taught students in grades K-16. Currently, Allison is an Assistant Professor of Education and is the Director of Clinical Experiences in the Klipsch Educators College at Marian University in Indianapolis. Her passion and future research agenda is community-embedded critical service learning as a conduit for culturally responsive pedagogy in teacher preparation.